

Wheat-Free Walt Disney World: Traveling with Celiac Disease

by Christina Tallini, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Traveling when you have Celiac Disease (a wheat/gluten allergy) can be difficult. Luckily, traveling to Walt Disney World is a pleasure. For those of us who have this disease, we know how stressful it is to eat out. If you want a vacation with minimal worry about what to eat, Disney is the place to go!

Planning is the key to everything. The first thing is to contact Disney. Go to DisneyWorld.com, and using the Contact Us form, note your food allergy. I did this and was emailed lists of safe food, drink and snacks for each park. In addition to this they ask for your dining reservation numbers, to alert the chefs at each restaurant what your allergy is. I also recommend checking out AllEars.net, which has all of the menus for Walt Disney World. I look to get an idea of what to eat before I go so that I can ask questions online or to the chef.

Walt Disney World is the one place that, when I say I have a gluten allergy, no one asks, "What kind of glue are you allergic to?" (Yes, I have been asked this.) So here are some of my personal favorite places to eat while at the "World."

The best place for a burger is Pecos Bill's in Frontierland in the Magic Kingdom. I already know what I can have, since I have gone there for years. The manager still comes out to make sure that nothing has changed, and that my food is carefully prepared. Bacon cheeseburger and fries on a toasted gluten-free bun, with a gluten-free chocolate chip cookie for dessert. Yum! The fixings can't be beat, with sauteed mushrooms, lettuce, tomato, pickles, and condiments. Try to get that at another fast food place -- it'll never happen!

Epcot has many, many choices and we have eaten at just about every restaurant in the World Showcase. Teppan Edo in Japan is different and fun. The shrimp sauce with the filet mignon is delicious. (Beware of cross contamination with the butter. They use a brick of butter that is constantly being touched with a soy sauce-laden spatula.) In Future World, Sunshine Seasons Food Fair in The Land pavilion is a good pick. There are many choices here, and the chefs are very helpful. I had the roasted pork, mashed potatoes, and a green salad. This could have easily been dinner. Dinner at the Garden Grill (also in The Land) is a wonderful thing. The floor rotates and circles the restaurant once every hour, providing an ever-changing view. The food is family style, all you can eat. With the exception of the bread, macaroni & cheese, and

stuffing I could have just about everything.

Animal Kingdom has some surprisingly good places to eat, thanks to the availability of gluten-free pizza dough. (This is also available at Pizza Planet, Mama Melrose's, and a few other places at WDW!) Pizzafari is the best place to get something different. The managers on duty are the nicest by far. I recognized the female manager immediately from last year. I wish I had her name because she goes out of her way to really try to make sure you're happy. Yes, you can get pizza here, but that's not the best part. They make a sandwich out of two gluten-free pizza crusts with turkey, ham, Swiss, provolone, and Caesar salad that was delicious. The Caesar dressing had caramel in it, but I took my chances and didn't get sick. I don't think I've had a sandwich out in at least five years, and this one was bigger than the sandwiches my family ordered. This is a definite treat. Dinner at Yak and Yeti was very good. The chef suggested chicken with rice noodles, which was delicious. It's a little easier for this restaurant to accommodate a Celiac, as they use a lot of rice products and they have gluten-free soy sauce. Dessert was three different sorbets, which was very good.

Disney's Hollywood Studios has some good food choices (including Pizza Planet and Mama Melrose's, which I mentioned previously). This time I tried the chicken bleu and fries for a change of pace at the ABC Commissary. Not too bad, but a little dry. The fruit cup for dessert was a good ending. The Backlot Express has gluten-free fried chicken fingers and fries, which was good and the portion was too large to finish. Dinner at Hollywood & Vine gives you many choices and the chefs are eager to make you anything you might like. Since it is a buffet, they have the ingredients to make almost anything. The Sci-Fi Dine-In restaurant is great for the kids but, even though the chef is very accommodating, it is back to standard fare of the old steak standby.

Some of my favorite restaurants are located at Walt Disney World resorts. We have eaten at Boma in the Animal Kingdom Lodge, and found this to be excellent. This buffet has many dishes that are naturally gluten-free, like fu fu, and potatoes with afritude. The Chef walks you through the buffet and if there is something they can make you, they will.

I could go on forever with minute details of all the restaurants we have ever been to in Walt Disney World, but I must be sure to include my two favorites - 'Ohana and Kona Cafe at the Polynesian Resort. A trip is just not complete without a stop at these restaurants. 'Ohana for dinner is an all you can eat paradise with a chef from heaven. TJ (this is his nickname) goes out of his way to delight the eye and the palate. TJ's creations make everyone else at the table want to be gluten-free. The

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appetizer consisted of chicken wings, drenched in a special sauce on a bed of delicious mashed potatoes and a decoration of cheese doodles. My main meal was a staircase of fried noodles, rice, and tender skewered pieces of chicken, beef, and pork. Dessert was a pyramid of brownie, banana, pineapple, and chocolate sauce-so good! The only problem is the food for the rest of the family comes out so fast, by the time your food comes out, they are already done. Just ask the waitress to hold off a short while.

Kona Cafe is also a great place to eat. The chef, Noah, came to the table and victoriously announced that he had mastered every item on the menu to be gluten-free. Choices were abundant. The macadamia nut and honey butter is scrumptious on a warm tapioca roll. The coconut almond chicken was very good, not too heavy. Dessert was the banana-chocolate crêpe brulee, which is decadent.

Even at Walt Disney World, those of us with Celiac Disease or other food allergies, take a chance when eating out. But if there is anywhere in this country where we have a fighting chance, it's Walt Disney World!

About The Author: Christina is a daycare provider/homemaker from Long Island, NY. She is married to Damian and has three children - Arielle, Michael and Anthony. She looks forward to planning her next Walt Disney World vacation with new experiences and never before seen events in 2010.

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